



## **Muhammad Shabazz I**

Oral History Transcription

July 17, 2009

Interviewed by:	Muhammad Shabazz II
Place of interview:	South Bend, Indiana
Date of interview:	July 17, 2009
Approximate length of interview:	14 minutes
Transcribed by:	Michelle Kathleen Wruck, Volunteer, Civil Rights Heritage Center
Date of transcription:	March 2018
Summary:	Mr. Shabazz worked briefly at the Muhammad Speaks Press in Chicago in the early '70s. He was also a dairy farmer in Mississippi and Cassopolis, Michigan. He came to South Bend in 1975 and worked at South Bend Screen Process. Later in life he took a trip to Mecca, which showed him the common humanity of all people. He's interviewed by his son, Muhammad Shabazz II, a student worker at the IU South Bend Civil Rights Heritage Center.

0:00:00 [Muhammad Shabazz II] Okay. The day is July 17, 2009. I'm interviewing Mr. Muhammad Shabazz I, and he's being interviewed by Muhammad Shabazz II.

Alright, for the record, tell me a little bit about yourself. You know, your name and where you were born and raised.

0:00:28 [Muhammad Shabazz II] My name is Muhammad Shabazz. It's actually been changed from Charlie [inaudible] Shabazz. I was born in Starkville, Mississippi. I'm the seventh of twelve kids, which is seven boys and five girls. I graduated from Moore High School, Moore Elementary School...

[MS I] And that's in Starkville?

[MS I] That's in Crawford, Mississippi.

[MSI] Crawford, Mississippi.

[MS I] Although, we lived in Starkville when the bussing situation... when the bussing situation and integration come around, we were bussed from Starkville to Crawford, Mississippi, which is about sixteen miles away.

[MS II] Do you know what year that was when they integrated those schools?

[MS I] They integrated them schools back in... at least they started the integration of the schools back in 1960-something, I believe.

0:01:30 [MS II] Okay, what was it like growing up down south in Mississippi and during that time frame?

[MS I] Well basically, [my probably like growing up in the way us], there wasn't whole lots of prejudice that we could, you know... that we could really tell.

[MS II] Okay.

[MS I] Probably due to the part of the south that you were born and raised.

[MS II] So, around what year did you decide to move up north?

0:01:59 [MS I] I decided to move up north right after I finished high school, which was 1970?

[MS II] Okay, and what was the reason?

[MS I] Just to see other areas.

[MS II] That's a good answer.

[MS I] You know, being born and raised in one area you would like to see other areas.

[MS II] Is that where I get that from?

[MS I] Possibly. (chuckles)

[MS II] Okay, so, what year did you decide to convert to Islam?

0:02:27 [MS I] I converted to Islam, it was around when I came to Chicago, between '72 and '73.

[MS II] Okay, and do you know why, or you just ...

[MS I] Yeah, basically, being from Mississippi, they have lots of Islamic principles. And when I began to look at Islam, I could see those same principles that you could see in the people of old.

[MS II] Did you change your name right away when you converted?

0:02:59 [MS I] No, I ain't change my name until 1976.

[MS II] The year before I was born.

[MS I] Right.

[MS II] And what do Shabazz mean?

[MS I] Shabazz means "A righteous-minded people."

[MS II] "A righteous-minded people."

Alright, tell me about your experiences once you converted to Islam. I remember when you used to tell me you was on a apple orchard type farm in Michigan.

0:03:25 [MS I] Yeah, when I first came to Chicago, actually I got a job at *Muhammad Speaks*. Actually, the way I got the job... my brother was on the bus, he used to ride the bus... on the way from work, he met a guy by the name of John X, that told him that they were doing some hiring at The Muhammad Speaks Press. So, I went to interview, fill out the application. So, they gave me the job. So, after a year or so after working at the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, I moved to the Muslim farm in Cassopolis Michigan.

0:04:02 [MS II] And what was that like? The farm?

[MS I] Well the reason I moved to the farm in Cassapolis... I used to run dairy in Mississippi.

[MS II] Right.

[MS I] So, I took a job on the dairy farm. You know, doing the same thing that I'd been doing in Mississippi.

[MS II] I mean, what was that farm like? You know, like, I was born in South Bend, on the East Side, you know?

[MS I] Well, you know, it's a farm. You know, we had 80 heads of cattle that we milked twice a day. Um, you know, farm life is 24/24. It's not 8 to 5, 8 to 4, 7 to 3; it's a 24-hour job.

0:04:42 [MS II] And you lived on the farm?

[MS I] Yeah, we lived on the farm. Because I really didn't like the big city. That's another one of the motivating factors.

[MS II] Of moving to Michigan?

[MS I] Of moving to Michigan, yeah.

[MS II] Alright, tell me about how you got married and started a family.

0:05:00 [MS I] Actually, I met my wife when I was living in Michigan, which is your mother.

[MS II] Mm-hmm.

[MS I] And we all lived on the farm there. You know, in the Islamic religion, it's better to be married than to be... um, anything else, so that's how that thing come about.

[MS II] Okay. So what year did you get to South Bend?

0:05:31 [MS I] I came to SB in 1975.

[MS II] Okay. What was it like in South Bend in the '70s, and the mid-'70s compared to Mississippi and Michigan? And that might not be a good question because... how long had you been up here from Michigan, I mean Mississippi?

[MS I] Um... five years.

[MS II] Five years? So, and I didn't even put Chicago in here, which would have been a good one, but what was it like in South Bend in the '70s compared to Mississippi, Michigan, and we can throw in Chicago, too.

0:06:01 [MS I] Um...well you have to realize, when I come to... I didn't leave in Chicago that long, probably about a year or so before I come to Michigan. But you have to realize, when I lived in Mississippi, we didn't live in the metropolitan area. You know, we lived in a rural area.

[MS II] I know, I been there.

[MS I] So, we didn't live like, the city life, like they live here. Where you...

0:06:34 [MS II] Chicago must have been really strange then, when you got there.

[MS I] It was! Really strange...

[MS II] Had to be like a whole new world.

[MS I] Yeah, when I got to Chicago, it was like a whole new situation. Like I was saying... city life not like the rural life. You know, city life is the everyday hustle and bustle, where the rural life is sort of relaxed. You know, you're not... you know, you can live off the fat of the land; you're not into that 9 to 5 business.

0:07:06 [MS II] Alright, so when you got to Michigan, it was kind of like being back in Mississippi 'cause it was rural.

[MS I] Right, when I got to Michigan, it was kind of like being back in Mississippi because... I was doing the same thing I was doing. As a matter of fact, speaking of the dairy. My mother had seven boys and the job I had, it started out with the oldest son and they'd have one finish school move on, then another one take the job. So that same job went through several boys. So, when I come to Michigan, I be doing the same thing that I been doing in Mississippi, so it was more like the same environment.

0:07:49 [MS II] So, what was the job situation like here in South Bend? Like, what was your first job you had when you got to South Bend? And how much different would that be compared to Michigan and Mississippi? And we could throw Chicago in there too, because you worked at the Press there.

[MS I] Like I said, it'd be more like, be more comparing to Chicago than Michigan or Mississippi because I lived in that rural area. But the job situation when I got to South Bend was good. My first job was at South Bend Screen Process on Franklin Street, where we were printing t-shirts and bumper stickers and real estate signs. Back then they were... we were printing 4x8ft. [pallen?]. They were using flocking?

0:08:42 [MS II] What's flocking?

[MS I] Flocking is where you print an image and then you come back and stick a type of felt over it. Once it dry, it feel like... more like felt than ink.

But the job situation here was good. You know, you could go out and you could find a job. I had a couple of jobs at one time. But, you know, today, it's hard to find a part-time job.

[MS II] Yeah, no doubt.

She asked... We was sitting in her office the other day and she pulled out this Koran and she said, "Oh," she got it from Brother Nabaa. You remember who he is?

[MS I] Yeah.

[MS II] She asked me did I know him and I was like, "I met him when I was younger."

[MS I] Yeah, I know Clarence Nabaa.

0:09:33 [MS II] What was your involvement in the Muslim community here in South Bend?

[MS I] I mean, just a, everyday member.

[MS II] Yeah, I remember we used to go to parties.

[MS I] Yeah.

[MS II] Alright now this is going to be a good one, so take your time and elaborate on this one how you want to. I want you to tell me about your pilgrim(mage) to Mecca and what was that experience like?

[MS I] My pilgrim(mage) to Mecca was an interesting experience. Well, you know that's a trip that a Muslim make once in a lifetime. You know, you could see it on television, you could read about it in books, but there's nothing like really being in that situation where you have 3.5 million people all in one place. Different languages... but you're all there for one purpose. You all go there for one purpose. And that was a great experience to me. That's probably the biggest conventional association, you know, on the planet... to have that many people there at one time.

0:10:52 But the interesting thing... You get to find out that people are basically the same. The men's all dressed, dressed the same way. You can't wear... when you going through the ritual you can't wear jewelry, you can't wear your designer clothes, designer perfume or cologne. You can't wear none of that. You leave all of that behind in the hotel. You only... you dress in two pieces of cloth, seamless cloth. So, there's nothing that you brought with you that you gone to wear during the rituals. So you can see the commonality of people. You see people... That everybody from the same origin. It's not... you don't see nationality there. Especially the men. All the men's are dressed the same. The women, they keep on the same clothes that they have on, but the men, they all dressed in the same type garment.

0:12:07 [MS II] So you were saying the only difference is, when you're there, is the language you speak.

[MS I] The only difference there is the language that you speak and some of that is not different because when you go through the rituals, regardless of where you from, you perform those same rituals. It's not,

you know, the Chinese don't do one thing, and the people from Indonesia, the people from America do something else. They all do the exact same thing. If you never open your mouth, you could never tell the difference, you know, in the people.

So, it just goes to show you that everybody have the same... regardless of where you live... everybody basically want the same thing.

[MS II] Oh, Yeah. No doubt.

0:12:55 So, what was your involvement with other organizations or politics in South Bend if you got involved at all?

[MS I] Basically, my involvement with politics was very limited.

[MS II] Did you get involved with any other organizations?

[MS I] No. No organizations.

[MS II] Alright, is there anything else you want to add to this interview?

[MS I] No, but I'm glad to be here.

[MS II] Yeah, I'm glad I can do this with my pops first. Thank you very much for participating in this oral interview. You'll be the first to know if I decide to publish this but it's going to go in the archives if not, at the History Center and once we move our stuff down to the Natatorium, it'll probably get moved down there too. I actually got to type out a transcript of everything we just talked about, but you know, that's cool.

[MS I] Okay. Thank you.

[Interview ends]